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Art and Technique: A Framework of Unaccomplished Promises

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## I. Art and technique in the crisis of contemporary capitalism: an anthropological materialist point of view

- 1 Thinking about the current relationship between art and technique implies considering the historical background of this relationship. For us today, it is the social, political and economic order that has been called "advanced" or "late" capitalism (Fredric Jameson, Ernest Mandel, Theodor W. Adorno). If art interrogates and problematizes this order intimately interrelated with modern technologies, it cannot avoid the encounter with technology in its conditions of production. However, we have already to dismiss possible misinterpretations that the epithets "advanced" and "late" give rise to, in that they may presuppose the final stage of a full development of capitalism. This teleological conception assumes that capitalism is measured only by itself, like an adult who reflects him or herself only in the mirror of his/her childhood and then his/her adolescence (merchant capitalism, then industrial capitalism). Such a perspective excludes any horizon of exit, in the short or middle term, any other individual or collective, any other offspring of history which could be enabled by technique and imagined by art. The reasoning that tries to account for history is therefore paralyzed and enfranchised in the figure of the manifest destiny of capitalism, while the imaginary is effectively colonized by the latter.
- 2 Just as the thermo-industrial technique marked nascent industrial capitalism (with the invention of the steam engine), the digital techniques of information and communication appear to mark the present stage of capitalism. It seems that, moving from one capitalism to another, we have moved from one technique to another. Macro-

and micro-sciences (astrophysics, quantum physics, chemistry, biology, but also neuroscience and social engineering) have had a massive impact on economic structures and social relations, but also on our bodies themselves, on their biology. In them are superimposed the various techno-powers inherited from the past: those which gave birth to societies of control structured by visible or invisible walls, punctuated by camps and overflowed by drones; those which created a biopolitics that disqualifies lives not worth being lived in favor of more "viable" subjects; those which modelled a pharmaco-pornographic capitalism in the form of a hormonal prison, by means of sometimes licit drugs (pills, hormones, Ritalin), and sometimes illicit ones (viagra, crack, crystal); and those which set in place an economy of attention that directs the path of our eyeball on the screen.

- 3 The techniques of the social order are defined less by what they include than by what they exclude: the nomadic proletarian, the madman, the spinster, the unconnected, in short, the unprofitable, the unusable, the banished – the left-over. If we try to think the same about art –from a rag of Gustave Caillebotte's floor (allegory of the lumpen proletariat, also figured on the same table) to a ragged poster of Mimmo Rotella (fossil of society consumption), to a Dadaistic used metro ticket (waste of general circulation)– could we say that the task of art is to expose (we do not say recycle) the materials that the society of production and consumption no longer wants? But what is the "technique" through this can be achieved? Towards (or away from) what other "technique" is this positioned? And towards which horizon (even recess) of another society?
- 4 When we think our world, we are inevitably haunted by the proper names that dominate the global web: Google (which owns YouTube, Waze, Android), Amazon, Facebook (including Whatsapp, Instagram), Apple, Microsoft (including Skype), then Netflix, Airbnb, Twitter, Uber ... These names of techniques that facilitate the flow of information are certainly symptomatic of a generalized acceleration, but they also contribute to this illusion of a "new step" disconnected from the previous ones (in this case that of a Californian capitalism, disconnected from the physical infrastructures of industrial capitalism and the fossil economy). Actually, this acceleration may well be just the inertial trajectory of capitalist modernity itself, inaugurated in the nineteenth century; and GAFAM may well be just a folding screen, making us believe in a qualitative leap, while our difference from the first modern generations is in reality only gradual. As Walter Benjamin wrote in the 1930s, "a generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood in the open air, amid a landscape in which nothing was the same except the clouds and, at its center, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile human body" (Benjamin 1999, 732). Today, a generation that sent postcards from their holiday resorts, picked up the phone under the stairs and turned the pages of the encyclopedia to find the definition of a word, has found itself discovering an immense flow of information and surveillance where "nothing is recognizable", except the print characters and, in the middle, in a field of polemics crossed by clashes, fake news and cyberbullying, the tiny and fragile human psyche. The course of experience – be it the strategic (wars without borders), economic (bubbles of speculation), bodily (attention disorders), moral (aggressiveness online) and even epistemological (end of the "truth") – does not cease to fall. What can art do about this? Should it use the enemy's weapons to turn them against him? Could it use its means without succumbing to its ends?

- 5 If it is true that there is a difference of degree, and not one of nature, between the first phase of capitalist modernity and our present time, then we can still learn from the art of yesterday, its postures and its impostures, its exposure to rejection and its desire for inclusion in the "system", its revolutionary commitments and its historical compromises, its rapture in face of technology and its criticism of technology. The fascination we feel in the face of great events such as revolutions or catastrophes remains the same: just as philosophers around the world were enthusiastic about the French Revolution of 1789 (spread and propelled by the printing press), they became enthusiastic in 2010-2011 for the Arab Spring or the movements of the squares (diffused and speeded up by social media) on a global scale. Just as writers of literature like Emile Zola transcribed the horror collectively shared in front of a mechanical accident (the railway accident), series makers (for which the authorship moved from the individual, Craig Mazin, to the society of production, HBO) are telling us today of the horrors of the nuclear accident.
- 6 Art responds, yesterday as today, to our anxieties, using the technique and the conditions of contemporary production (Zola with the newspaper *feuilleton*'s literary montage, Mazin with the serial's TV montage). On one hand, art confronts us with the problems of civilization, through a playful technique, which gives pleasure to the spectator. On the other hand, art does not hesitate to show us a deadly technique that destroys humanity, leading us to a certain zone of discomfort that puts our way of life into question. As the scale of catastrophe has changed, it is unfortunately easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. That is why, if we want to localize a difference of nature between yesterday and today, this may lie, as Ricœur insisted defending utopia (Ricœur 1986), in today's deprivation of an alternative political imaginary, and specifically the one which could accompany or even deploy playful technique. And yet human experience continues its fall down the vortex of technological vertigo (including, sometimes, in the tittytainment of series or serials), and in its correlative denial of the catastrophe.
- 7 Scientists speak today of the "Anthropocene". By eclipsing the term "Holocene", this term signals that humankind has become a decisive geological force for the terrestrial globe. Perhaps one should rather speak of the "Capitalocene", because it was thermo-industrial technology, born alongside capitalism and intensified thereafter, which have radically changed the natural conditions of our habitat and other living species, by causing the greenhouse effect, global warming and the climate crisis (Malm 2017). These phenomena (yesterday still discussed by scientists, but now visible to everybody and tragically experienced by some people) are fully part of the historical consciousness and the collective imagination of our time, in particular that of the artists. Capitalism has been the propeller of these harmful technologies for life on earth. Thinking art in its confrontation with technology and in its uses of techniques (production, editing...) will thus not be here the subject of a theoretical speculation on capitalism as an abstract entity, but an attempt to apprehend a terribly concrete historical fact that strikes the whole of nature and, for the middle and long term, the cosmos.<sup>1</sup>
- 8 In this context, an anthropological materialist approach discards the naïvetés concerning both art and technique, and is as up-to-date at the turn of the last century as it is today, just as relevant in the context of industrial capitalism as in that of contemporary capitalism.

- 9 With regards to technique, this approach rejects the idea of its "neutrality" and knows that a technique is a gesture or a tool that fits into a larger cultural ensemble from which it cannot be isolated (in the industrial and post-industrial context: a "technical macro-system" [Gras 1997]). As the ethnologist's reaction suggests in a captivating scene of the beautiful film by Ciro Guerra, *Embrace of the Serpent* (2015), giving a knife to a native who shapes his environment with his hands does not necessarily constitute "progress". Even in the strict technical sense of an increase in efficiency (fundamentally ethnocentric), such intrusion would crack and disorganize all the elements of the native's symbolic and cosmological world. On another front, detaching nuclear energy from a set of precautions and surveillance practices specific to this era is the greatest danger that we bequeath to future generations, if we confront the longevity of radiation and the ephemeral nature of collective memory. In general terms, thinking that technique is a means like any other to control nature (in the modern conception), the gods (in a "traditional" conception) or the magical forces (in a "primitive" conception)<sup>2</sup>, implies a poor conception that is indifferent to the principle itself of the technique. Such a position is, alias, sometimes shared by a vulgar or a dogmatic Marxism, mechanical and teleological, from which anthropological materialism should distinguish itself. Believing that technique (and we will see immediately how much this anthropology of technique involves a conception of aesthetics) is a means to dominate nature, amounts in believing that Auguste Rodin uses the hammer in order to subordinate stone. But another conception, inspired by Walter Benjamin, is possible: namely that Rodin and his hammer are one, in the impetus of his creative gesture to free the stone from the form it contains in germ, and that its creator sensed without having imagined it (he did not plan the form: it arose along the way, as in a conversation between him and the stone). In this case, the technique is not the instrument of human's domination over the nature (or even over other humans), but on the contrary that of a joint release of humankind and nature.
- 10 And just as this crossroads of materialism and anthropology frees itself from a certain naivety or dogmatism in relation to technique, it does the same in relation to art. To make a revolutionary work of art does not amount to a formal revolution, at least not only. Revolutionizing forms, as Picasso did, does not necessarily make him a revolutionary, even when he shapes feelings of indignation and anger with *Guernica*. On the other hand, to make a revolutionary work of art does not mean to be satisfied with the revolution of the content: even if this is a progress, it is not enough to put workers (or blacks, LGBTQs, etc.) in the picture or in the photographic lens that once captured the bourgeoisie or aristocrats. This is the meaning of the criticism that Walter Benjamin addresses to the New Objectivity (1999, 774-776), which he treats as an imposture (such criticism may be addressed today to Sebastião Salgado, in that he aestheticises misery).
- 11 As much as this criticism may seem severe, what is at stake here is the possibility of leaving the opposition of content/form or means/end. When artists break with the conformism of their time (as far as we are concerned, that of the current capitalism) they do not seek to revolutionize the form or the content, but the technique of their production. Thus, they crack the technical framework in which the work is usually done, transgressing borders, references and stereotypes. In Benjamin's demanding conception (to which few works of art perhaps correspond, but which can nevertheless serve us as a compass), artists somehow break the "beautiful form", the agreed and the

expected. They disperse the beautiful apparition (the aura, "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be" [Benjamin, 2002a, 104-105]) to show the essential in the fragments that lie on the ground. And this is not the horizon in which the spectator is absorbed to the point of disappearance, but fragments of lost horizons that strikes him or her. By revolutionizing their production's technique, artists sketch a gesture reproducible by millions of people, who can do the same with theirs. In this way, they do not "illuminate" the spectators with an enlightened, vertical knowledge, but implement for themselves, like a line of horizontal light, the sharp gesture that cuts out appearances, allowing us to imagine a gesture that can be likewise an inaugurator in other places, for other people.

- 12 In short, an anthropological materialist approach rejects the medium/end and form/content dichotomies for technique as much as for art. Technique is no more a means to an end (that of dominating nature) than art is the shaping of a content; and art is neither the means (e.g. Soviet realism as a means for the revolutionary purpose) by which its technique would elevate a pre-established content to a completed form. From a more general point of view, art is not a form free of all determination (a form detached from the content of its time), but neither is it the simple repetition of a content (a form reduced to the content of its time, like a "reflection of its epoch"). Art is not totally free from the techniques that surround us, but it is not totally determined by them either. It exists as a fragment of the historical moment, that is to say, as a piece of our time, but as a detached one, which reveals it to us under the effect of a specular projection.

## II. Temporal operators, subversions and collective sensibility: towards a new aesthetic regime of technique

- 13 The articles in this issue of *Anthropology & Materialism* on "Art and Technique" are situated in this complex series of heterogeneous temporalities and confronted with the capitalist present, which is the inevitable framework of both current art's practices and technical innovations. By studying the works of some contemporary artists, the article by **Marta Hernández** ("The *Material Making* in the Work of Art after the Appearance of Digital Technologies") pays attention to the anachronistic aspect of the gap between traditional techniques of artistic creation, in particular the manual shaping of objects (by chiselling, textile, ceramics), and the world of today's digital technologies. The current historical trend towards the dematerialization of the means of production should have relegated to the background these artisanal works of art, or even cause their disappearance. But it is the opposite that happens, because these works, with their hybrid temporalities, still use the material and display a criticism to work on a reality in permanent transformation. This strong return of the material in the digital atmosphere may well be the visible and contemporary reproblematicization of the opposition between form and content regarding the work of art.
- 14 Another consequence of the technical revolutions in social life is the use of facial surveillance, as insists **Jana Haeckel**'s article ("Infiltrate the Algorithms. Digital Masking as an Artistic Form for Our Present"). For Haeckel, the September 11, 2001 attack accelerated exponentially the development of computer technologies for

biopolitical surveillance. Through algorithms, the new police technologies have managed to combine the culture of surveillance obsessed by the terrorist threat with the mathematization of facial and body recognition. And the production of huge databases has been accompanied by a flagrant violation, everywhere in the world, of laws on the image right and the confidentiality of private life. Social networks have also contributed to these political and economic appropriations, sometimes illegal, of facial images, available to police interpretation and identification of bodies. In contrast to these new surveillance technologies implemented by States, the author analyzes the works of artists who expose not only the social scale of the problem, but also the unforeseen possibilities of subverting this surveillance structure. Such subversion displays a seemingly anachronistic gesture: masking. In this case, it is not about returning the system against itself with its own weapons, but on the contrary about reappropriating an anthropological gesture in ways that are irremediably heterogeneous with the current political project of digital tooling.

- 15 From a theoretical point of view, deconstructing the model of means/ends intelligibility in order to think the technique passes through the criticism of a conception strongly rooted in the contemporary imagination: this conception, often technophilic, conceives the technique like a simple means that can be used for any purpose (we can do a "good" or "bad" use of the internet, nuclear, etc.). Without falling into the symmetrical gesture of technophobia, for which the end corrupts the means like the worm the apple (there can be no good use of the Internet or of nuclear power: one would inevitably lead to stupidity, the other to destruction), one can attempt to detail the set of sensible and aesthetic mediations that unfold between humans and technique, between the end and the means. This is the goal of **Adolfo Vera**, who values here the concept of "techno-aesthetics", originally developed by the philosopher-engineer Gilbert Simondon ("Gilbert Simondon's techno-aesthetics and the legacy of Karl Marx: perspectives and confrontations"). This concept operates in several senses. On the one hand, it transforms the aesthetics of contemplation into a practical dynamic, raising at the same time the instrumental technique to an active relation of *jouissance*. On the other hand, it allows us to think, within the framework of historical materialism, a policy of technical sensitivity; a sort of poetry of the material forces transmitted to the relations between humans. Thus the concept of "techno-aesthetics" reveals the possibility of an emancipated relationship with the technical objects similar to that thought by Benjamin, that is to say free of this magical aura of technology (that Marx calls "commodity fetishism" and Simondon "halo effect"); an aura resulting from a transfiguration of social relations between humans (the technician and the user) in a relation between users and technical "things", where either things resist humans in a mysterious way (when they does not work) or humans fetishize them in a magic manner (when they work miraculously).
- 16 With his concept of "second technique", linked to the playful and interactive dimension of the work of art, Benjamin is a precursor of the concept of "techno-aesthetics". Indeed, as **Jan Sieber** shows in his text "Walter Benjamin's Concept of Technique", the potential of art and the one of technique are intertwined when their magical auras are overcome in a playful interaction that releases human passions and the attractions of nature. Artistic creation and aesthetic reception thus form a veritable playground where humanity can train to the possibilities opened up by new technologies, where it can experience new sensations and imagine historical trajectories unheard of until then. Neither art nor technique are "means" (good or bad) for "ends" (good or bad):



they are "structured like a language". Here, language is not, as bourgeois instrumental reason implies, an available vehicle that goes from a source (me) to a target (my interlocutor). On the contrary, language, in the Benjaminian sense of poetic creation, is a material environment in which a being can find expression, and therefore exist. Not a "means to an end", an instrument of transmission, but a "pure means", a medium in the almost magical sense of the term. In this reading, art, which has been able to emancipate itself from its "religious value" (religious and dogmatic) in favor of its "show value" (playful-magic) allows to train women and men to possibilities of a technique otherwise dominated by an anachronistic power structure. There is no "bad" and "good" use of technique, but an interaction between humans and the world mediated by it, that can either repeat the old structures of domination and oppression, or liberate matter and anthropos towards new horizons.

- 17 To deconstruct the spontaneous axiology associated with a "good" and "bad" use of technique, one can dive deeper into the roots of a complex system that goes not only from the designers to the users, but which also includes the economic interests and the intrinsic values of the techniques. **Andrew Feenberg** proposes the concept "techno-system" to think about the implementation of technical knowledge and the spaces of social life that it implies systematically. In the interview he granted us ("Technology, Capitalism, Art and Imagination"), Feenberg does not consider the technosystem as an obstacle to the development of humanity, but as the very condition for its emancipation. In the epistemological dimension of technology lies the problem of the lack of communication between two classes of knowledge, the scientific and the empirical one. Feenberg analyzes the social disjunctions that occur between the formal and informal dimensions of technical knowledge, that is, between the knowledge of experts and the one of users. Economic interests and their ideological legitimation are nourished precisely by the gap between these two forms of knowledge, which prevents a real technological awareness taking place, that could either alert the current catastrophe, or expose the sacrifice of the great potential for the collective for the benefit of a few. As Feenberg shows, the playful deployment of technology away from capitalist imperatives is not a vain utopia; it is already under way. But it is reserved for a few privileged people (in the film industry, among the creators and users of video games, etc.). In its critical relationship with technology, art also frees itself from instrumental rationality, puts together the predispositions of humankind with the dispositions of nature, and allows us to project ourselves - as the moderns did with technical imagination - in other places and other times. In this way, art gives back power to the social imagination as the creative and practical instance of technical rationality.
- 18 The power of the social imagination, which is also the power of dreams, fantasies and collective desires, is a significant part of political rationality. The different types of shows and popular entertainment that we know (from the multimedia circus to video games, from music videos to magazines about celebrities) may seem disconnected with the serious domain of laws and political decisions, but actually tell us something very decisive about people's wishes. As it is showed in **Carlos Pérez López's** review of **Stephen Duncombe's** book, *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, recently translated into Spanish, these products of cultural industry, whose aesthetic forms are fed by the latest technologies, often interpret political hope of another world much better than the speeches of politicians talking about "People", fighting against the "Poverty", or even appealing to the "Proletariat". While a certain elitist posture



within progressivism rejects vulgar forms of culture because it sees nothing but aberration, Duncombe sees in them a whole program to be deployed (thus moving away from the criticism of the culture industry by the Frankfurt School, he seems to approach the positions of the cultural studies of the Birmingham School). In this sense, the architectural crystallization of collective dreams (for the city of Las Vegas), the fantasy of the spectators as producers (for the video game *Grand Theft Auto*) and the staging of a true community of knowledge (around the life of celebrities) are deciphered by Duncombe as fantasmatic realizations of utopian desire.

- 19 Similarly, the incessant adaptation of humans to the speed of capital is transformed into a utopia of fulfilling work. The world of temporalities and partitioned spaces (public space and private life, work and rest, etc.) would be substituted by a world that merges all these dimensions into a homogeneous whole. An emblematic case is that of Google. From an image of the future Googleplex, a project of a city-society in miniature, open and transparent, combining work, spaces of leisure, social life, nature and trade, the article of **Sébastien Broca** ("The Future of Work according to Google") deploys the different ideological threads that weave this conception of work interweaving desires of individual realization, autarkic tendency and shreds of utopia. Shreds of utopia, because the idea of a space which brings together in a transparent place the time of the work and that of the social life is nourished with the tradition of the Fourierist phalansteries and the dreamed cities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Autarkic tendency, if we consider the reactions of the American local institutions vis-a-vis the possible political potential of this Empire in its Empire. And as for individual realization, the transparent image of happy work is also based on a division of class, since the way to value a privileged sector of production (qualified personnel, creative work, cultural space), lies on a relocated and largely invisible production network, which goes from Africa (for mineral exploitation) to Asia (for the manufacture of IT devices), and this by exploiting without compensation the databases of users across the whole world.
- 20 The time of social life colonized by capitalist efficiency limits the visibility of other ways of organizing life, as long as these other ways are considered as anthropological data of a backward society or experiences of isolated worlds without future. At the antipodes of this closed imagination, **Raina Zimmering's** article ("The Zapatistas' Reception of Technology reflected in their Muralism") proposes a study of Zapatista culture in the territory dominated by the guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, EZLN), in Chiapas, Mexico. Fiercely opposed to the economic, biological and geopolitical imperatives of capitalist culture, the Zapatistas still maintain an open relationship with the Western development of sciences, humanities and technology, without losing sight of the regulatory principle of their society: indigenous cosmology and a harmonious relationship with nature. All these reasons, besides the historical, religious and political roots of the peasant struggles animated by Emiliano Zapata at the beginning of the twentieth century, find their narrative expression in Muralism, an artistic practice which is at the same time a reflection of their political life, because it comprises in the participation and decision of community members (including activists and human rights observers who temporarily share their daily lives). The prejudice of isolation and lack of future that weighs on Zapatista culture falls apart, since Zimmering describes the Zapatistas' desires in incorporating elements of Western culture and knowledge, but also their willingness to keep their doors open for those who decide to take refuge with them.

- 21 Among the inventions of modernity, since its origins, photography constitutes a kind of permanent event. This technical invention includes many products, images, brands and advertisements, but also artistic practices. Its impact in modern life reaches one of the most fundamental levels of humanity's regime of experience because it touches on our ability to transmit, transforming the image in a true witness of history. The article by **Mauricio Lissovsky** ("The Tourist and «the One Who Waits»") thus treats photography as a revelation of modern temporalities. Discarding the false intuition according to which the photographic act would consist of the cut of time or the capture of an instant torn from its course, Lissovsky focuses on the duration contained in any photography, that is to say, on the time of the forces acting between waiting and clicking. But photography, as art, technique, image and social root, still reveals other very heterogeneous temporalities, as it contains the dialectical potential of a duration which will be seen in a present to come as "what has been". In this way, it shapes the figure of the tourist where the time of boredom is a threat to the modern worker when he enjoys his vacation time; and it shows itself as a true epistemological model of history - as Benjamin conceptualized -, as the source of an archaeological work on disfigurements and disappearances contained in the image. The scale of the photographic phenomenon cannot more eloquently expose the tension between art, technique and technology throughout the capitalist era.
- 22 "The past has left us images comparable to those that light prints on a photosensitive plate. Only the future has developers that are active enough to search such clichés perfectly" (Benjamin 2002b, 482 [N15a,1]). This sentence that Benjamin quote from Monglond can not better condense the relationship between photography and history, not only as a metaphor or analogy, but also as an image of the dynamic relationship between past and future in historical memory. **Georges Didi-Huberman** has masterfully shown how one could "reveal", nearly fifty years later, four small obscure photographs taken at Auschwitz-Birkenau at a time when the bodies of human beings were being burned. In the interview he gave to **Ilana Feldman**, "Some bits of film, some political gestures," the philosopher explains how he returned, ten years after his own analysis, to the crime scene, his camera slung over his shoulder, loaded with questions from those bits of film miraculously saved from the disaster. He also explains why it is necessary to inscribe the gesture of the testimony (printed in the technical gesture of the photographic click) into the frame of art history, which makes the latter at the same time anthropological and political. He describes finally how his doubts were born in the transformation of a "place of barbarism" into a "place of culture" (that means, in front of an exhibition technology that orders the aesthetics destined to edify the visitor) and the necessity to unfold them not through a discursive reasoning, with scientific evidences and academic style, but through a literary sensibility, through a work of writing and a reflexion on aesthetics.
- 23 The revelation of past in the present could be explained, following Benjamin, by the technical metaphor of photography or even by its literal incarnation, if photography is well problematized. All this temporal dynamic also recalls the Freudian theory of the aftermath, according to which certain facts of the past life of an individual become readable only in subsequent events. In his article "Berlin childhood around 1900 Walter Benjamin. A childhood remembered according to Freud's theory of the aftermath", **Olivier Taïeb** enquires into Benjamin's writings dedicated to the reminiscences of the hopes and promises deposited in the philosopher's childhood. Taken in the movement

of his translation of Proust, the images found by Benjamin in his childhood anticipate his own theory of historical knowledge, delivering the constellation of the same mnemonic experience of writing, since historical intelligibility will also be the meeting of a past and a present as an inner experience of the collective. That is why, in Benjamin, the past is never definitive, but always ajar, waiting for the future to decipher the sign of its temporal mark.

- 24 This is also the argument of **Marc Berdet** in his review of the work of **Enzo Traverso**, *Left-Wing Melancholia*, a veritable gallery of works of art crossed by the technique, from engraving to cinema, through photography. The melancholia that our gaze of today poses on these works does not have to do with a morbid fixation on the lost object, mediated by an old-fashioned rhetoric or by idealized figures of the past (that is, a stagnant melancholy, which sometimes only expresses the cynical search of a dandy artist in the market of affections), but rather refers, in a more productive way, to a tense expectation vis-à-vis a missing object, and to a constant availability vis-à-vis of a desire not realized in the past, and which ceaselessly challenges our present.
- 25 In this sense, it is this secret intelligibility of the past that authorizes us here to raise the question of the relations between art and technique: it is indeed a question of recovering the childhood memories of a collective's inner experience where art and technology recognize the premonitory signs and unfinished promises of their relationship. And it is also this intelligibility that allows us to deconstruct the Historical Reasons which enclose our time in a linear conception where the past and the future seem irremediably bound by the iron law of capital.

## In memoriam Jan Sieber

- 26 In 2018, we suffered the brutal loss of our colleague and editor friend Jan Sieber. Jan was a very active member of the editorial board of our journal, which he helped to found with the energy and enthusiasm that was peculiar to him. He also co-edited two issues, one on the persistence of mythical forces in our present, against which, according to him, it was absolutely vital to constantly fight; the other on the persistence of the thought of Walter Benjamin in the context of the renewed political crises in our time.
- 27 "Persistence" may have been the term that characterized Jan: a candid impulse that might seem ingenuous and bold at first, but whose strength remained and spread in a contagious way, giving each and every one a confidence that could bring down all obstacles on the road. This is how he has imprinted the dynamic of our collective work, given energy and a direction, through an unshakeable sense of humor combined with a deep intellectual acuity.
- 28 Jan was about to finish his PhD thesis work. In his singular career, he devoted much of his research to the study of technique in Benjamin. With the sadness that his absence leaves us, but also with the joy of being able to count forever with the freshness of his thought, we publish in this issue his article on the concept of technique in Walter Benjamin.
- 29 This publication is dedicated to his memory.

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## NOTES

1. We will distance ourselves from the dominant conception of the Anthropocene, in spite of an apparent affinity that could indicate our use of the term anthropos. The entry of the human species on the stage of geological history (Anthropocene) should not be confused with the inclusion of human relations in the sphere of material forces (anthropological materialism). "Anthropological" materialism, or "materialist" anthropology, which we defend here, is opposed to the ideology conveyed by the idea of the Anthropocene on three fronts: that of teleology, that of historicity, and that of utopia.

First, anthropological materialism is a critique of teleology in Marxism (it does not only exist the mechanical course of reason in history, it also exist the poetic arising of collective passions), as it is a critique of bourgeois reason's teleology in general, a reason which tends to naturalize historical phenomena. The notion of "Anthropocene" is linked to a teleological narrative following the fact that human being has invented the steam engine that would warm the climate (in its most caricatural version, it is possible to go back to the invention of fire, as if there had been no other economies independent of the systematic exploitation of fossil fuels for thousands of years). It thus poses humankind as an inescapable geological force, and no longer as a historical force with different destinies, and this is the ultimate naturalization of bourgeois reason.

Second, anthropological materialism is, according to Walter Benjamin, valuable only if it is included in historical materialism, as a corrective to its abstraction tendencies, which are sometimes only recoveries of bourgeois abstraction. In this way, it is able to situate the historical

actors of global warming: the ruling classes of industrial England who, in the nineteenth century, decided to found their economy on the combustion of fossil fuels, forming battalions of servile laborers as it has never been seen in history. Going back to the social construction of causes compels us to remember that nothing here is inescapable.

Third, anthropological materialism refers to humankind as a material force at the point where this force has been frustrated, and indicates the way to unfold it freely in a harmonious society. Thus, by pointing out to the alternatives that were possible in the past, and that have been crushed by the dominant teleological narrative, anthropological materialism reopens the present.

2. All conceptions that may just have been invented by the moderns, as argued by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) or Goody (2006).